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Romanticismo Social. Poemas de Robert Southey sobre la esclavitud

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ABSTRACT

Great Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807 and eventually slavery in 1834. During this period, the literary production was not oblivious to the anti-slavery movement, on the contrary, a good number of romantic poets portrayed images of both slavery and the slave trade in order to publicize the horrors of these practices and contribute to their abolition. Robert Southey, appointed poet Laureate in 1813, was in fact one of the many romantic poets that included the issue of slavery in his literary production. This dissertation, therefore, is aimed to enquire into the relationship between the abolitionist movement and romanticism in Britain based on Robert Southey's anti-slavery poems: 'Sonnets on the Slave Trade' (1797), "To the Genius of Africa" (1797) and "The Sailor who Had Served in the Slave Trade" (1798).

KEY WORDS: Romanticism, abolitionist movement, anti-slavery writings, Robert Southey, Poems on the slave trade.

RESUMEN

Gran Bretaña abolió el comercio de esclavos en el año 1807 y finalmente la esclavitud en 1834. Durante este tiempo o periodo, la producción literaria no fue ajena al movimiento anti-esclavista, sino que más bien, un buen número de los poetas románticos retrataron imágenes de la esclavitud y del comercio de esclavos para publicitar los horrores de estas prácticas, y en cierto modo, contribuir en su abolición. Robert Southey, acuñado Poeta Laureado en 1813, fue de hecho uno de los muchos poetas románticos que incluyó el tema de la esclavitud en su producción literaria. Esta disertación, por tanto, tiene como objetivo investigar en la relación entre el movimiento abolicionista y el romanticismo en Bretaña a partir de una serie de poemas anti-esclavistas de Robert Southey: 'Sonnets on the Slave Trade' (1797), "To the Genius of Africa"(1797) and "The Sailor who Had Served in the Slave Trade" (1798).

PALABRAS CLAVE: Romanticismo, movimiento abolicionista, obras anti-esclavistas, Robert Southey, Poemas sobre el comercio de esclavos.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Romantic era was a turbulent period which experienced numerous political, social and cultural changes. Along with the French Revolution, the American Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, the anti-slavery movement drew the attention of numerous romantic poets. In this context of revolution, a good number of literary works were published to reflect the wrongs of slavery and, contributed to the abolition of the slave trade in Britain.

Robert Southey was one of the romantic writers highly concerned with the political situation of Britain, and in this case, with the abolitionist movement. When thinking about Romanticism, however, we always tend to associate it with the First Generation of poets – William Blake, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge- and with the Second Generation -Percy B. Shelley, Lord Byron and John Keats. However, when the name Robert Southey is mentioned, there is little known about him. Nonetheless, Robert Southey was in fact one of the most prolific and controversial poets of his age, yet he was relegated to the shadows of the romantic literature. Recently, scholars and critics have shown an increasing interest and enthusiasm on Southey and his contribution to the romantic period. In this dissertation, therefore, as far as possible, I want to give him the recognition that he deserves.

Having said all this, the objective of my final year dissertation is to analyse the relationship between slavery and romantic writing, focussing on Robert Southey's revolutionary poems written with the goal of exposing the horrors of the slave trade system and slavery in Britain.

This paper is divided into five main parts. The first part gives some insight into defining features of romanticism and its two different branches: the aesthetic and the social. Slavery was indeed one of the events that triggered the imagination of the romantic poets. Since this dissertation is focused on the anti-slavery literature in Britain, the second part provides a historical overview of the British abolitionist movement. The third chapter delves into the matter of those romantic authors who reflected the wrongs of slavery and showed anti-slavery positions in their works. The fourth section is devoted to the romantic poet Robert Southey. It is mainly focused on Southey's early contribution to the romantic period in addition to his engagement with the abolitionist movement. Afterwards, I will perform a close analysis of Southey's poems on the slave trade. Thus, I will analyse the collection 'Poems on the Slave Trade' (1797), "To the Genius of Africa" (1797) and "The

Sailor who had Served in the Slave Trade” (1798). Eventually, I will conclude with the necessary concluding section in which I will summarise my main findings and will advance some possible future lines of research deriving from the present work.

In order to develop this dissertation I have used several sources which are cited in the last chapter of this paper. When exploring about the social vision of romanticism I have found very useful Marilyn Butler’s *Romantic, Rebels and Reactionaries* (Oxford University Press, 1981). The book *A historical Guide to World to Slavery* (Oxford University Press, 1998) was essential to provide the overview of the British abolitionist movement. Overall, Duncan Wu’s *A Companion to Romanticism* (Blackwell, 1998) was very helpful since it includes sections devoted to the origin of the term ‘romantic’ or to the historical context of the period. But above all, Duncan Wu’s guide was fundamental to develop the chapter “Slavery and romantic writing”. Besides, Lynda Pratt’s *Robert Southey and the Context of English Romanticism* (Ashgate Publishing, 2013) was really useful when trying to gather information about Southey’s life and contribution on the romantic period. Due to the lack of studies, editions and reviews about Robert Southey, it has been difficult to gather information about the writer and his relation with the abolitionist movement. Carol Bolton’s *Writing the Empire: Robert Southey and Romantic Colonialism* was the only source in which the question of slavery in Robert Southey is addressed. Finally, the poems aimed to be analysed are taken from the edition Lynda Pratt’s *Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793-1810*, volume 5 (Routledge, 2004).

2. SOCIAL ROMANTICISM

Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, *the creations of their age*. From this subjection the loftiest do not escape.

(Shelley 135, my italics)

The term romanticism, as regards literature, is a term coined a posteriori, that it is to say, the writers that nowadays are classified within the group 'romantic' in the eighteenth century they were not (Perry 4). As a matter of fact, the term 'romantic' was conceived in a different manner, being used to refer to the literary genre of the 'romance' (Butler 1). At the time, romantic writers were gathered in different schools, being the most famous the 'Lake School' which includes William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey; the 'Demonic School' with Lord Byron or the 'Cockney School' including writers as Leigh Hunt and John Keats; amongst others (Perry 4). Nevertheless, it was not until the decade of 1860 that the most famous romantic writers – William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley and John Keats- became labelled as such (Butler 1). Nevertheless, in the early twentieth century the canon of the Romantic authors changed, thus some figures like Wordsworth and Blake became more relevant, eclipsing other important poets as Southey (Perry 6).

Critics do not agree to provide a unique definition of what romanticism is, in fact, some of them defend that 'Romantic is a bad name for the poetry of the nineteenth century because it sets you looking for a common quality when you ought to be reading or remembering individual poems' (Perry 8- 9). In the words of Marylyn Butler, Romanticism is 'inchoate because it is not a single intellectual movement but a complex of responses to certain conditions which Western society has experienced and continues to experience since the middle eighteenth century' (Butler 184). Another common problem in defining Romanticism is about its dates. In general, it is commonly said that it begun in 1798 with Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* and finished by 1832 with the death of Sir Walter Scott (Carter and Mc Rae 197). Other scholars, however, place its beginning in 1789 with the publication of Blake's *Song of Innocence*, coinciding with the outbreak of the French Revolution (Butler 8). Nevertheless, while a

variety of problems emerge around the definition of the term Romanticism, this paper will use the definition suggested by Margaret Drabble who saw it as:

[A] literary movement, and profound shift in sensibility, which took place in Britain and throughout Europe roughly between 1770 and 1848. Intellectually it marked a violent reaction to the Enlightenment. Politically it was inspired by the revolutions in America and France [...] Emotionally, it expressed an extreme assertion of the self and the value of individual experience [...] together with the sense of the infinite and the transcendental. Socially it championed progressive causes. [...] The stylistic keynote of Romanticism is intensity, and its watchword is 'Imagination' (Drabble 842).

Butler states that Romanticism 'is fed by two intellectual branches' (Butler 7). On the one hand, it is aesthetic movement, 'as a theory about nature and origin of art'. But at the same time, Romanticism was closely linked with the political and social events developed during period. The arts experienced a revolutionary transformation in every sense. Regarding the aesthetic principles, René Wellek resumes that Romantic poets 'see the implication of imagination, symbol, myth and organic nature, and see it as part of the great endeavour to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious... It is a closely coherent body of feeling' (7). Poetry was regarded as a product of a creative process in which the imagination, the subjectivity and the intuition were the most important factors (7). Besides, most of the romantic writers dealt in their works with the issue of the individual self and the individual experience and celebrated the subject of nature (Kitson 298).

This profound aesthetic revolution was fostered at the same time by the political and social unrest. Indeed the last decades of the eighteenth century experienced an age of revolution. The American War of Independence, the Industrial Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars and the French Revolution are some of events that determined this period. As a matter of fact, the French Revolution (1789-1799) changed the political ideas, attitudes and culture of many European people (Ferber 94). It had such an impact all over Europe that encouraged the literary revolution in Britain. As a matter of fact, young romantic writers praised the liberal movement, as Wordsworth famously wrote in *The Prelude*: 'bliss was it in that dawn to be alive / But to be young was very heaven!' (Ferber 95). Robert Southey also championed the revolution: 'Old things seemed passing away, and nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race' (Duff 25). As

the French Revolution triggered a cultural, social and political revolution, poets began to regard themselves as rebels, visionaries and, through their literature they attempted to innovate and reconstruct (Duff 26). In fact, it was in the romantic period when the figure of the poet was so praised and celebrated that it began to be considered not only a creator but also a 'hero, a prophet and preacher' (Ferber 32). As Shelley says in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821): 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World' (Shelley 508).

Thus for instance, Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* were innovative and revolutionary in the sense that apart from showing Blake's own concern with the social and political situation, deals also with the individual, precisely with innocence and experience (Kitson 304 - 316). In the same regard, Wordsworth and Coleridge's collection of poems *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) were regarded as an experiment which broke with the previous poetics. Also, Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805) was a revolutionary work which includes Wordsworth's own excitement and fervour towards the French Revolution, which greatly praises the nature and its landscapes (31). Besides, it is in this work in which he defines Imagination as an: 'absolute strength/ And clearest insight, amplitude of mind, / and reason in her most exalted mood' (Gilroy 3).

The problem of slavery, which emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, was another of the historical events that triggered the romantic imagination. Many romantic poets were influenced by the anti-slavery movement, publishing numerous works with the objective of exposing the real and harsh reality of the slave-trade. In that sense, Robert Southey was one of the many romantic poets who joined this social fight with the publication of works as 'Poems on the Slave Trade' (1797), *To the Genius of Africa* (1797) and *The Sailor Who had Served in The Slave Trade* (1799), which will be analysed subsequently. Nevertheless, in order to know the importance of the anti-slavery romantic literature is necessary to introduce briefly the process performed to abolish the slave trade and eventually slavery. The following section, therefore, provides an overview of the anti-slavery movement in Britain.

3. ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In the late eighteenth century Britain was one of the major nations regarding slave trade. According to Helen Thomas, by the decade of 1770, Britain accumulated a population of 878.000 slaves in its colonies. They originally came from ‘the Windward Coast (modern Liberia), the Gold Coast (Ghana), and the Slave Coast (Togoland Dahomey and Western Nigeria)’ (Thomas 17). Moreover, around 45.000 ships lead by the British were shipped from Africa to the West Indies and America under inhumane conditions. In addition, its main important slave ports were settled in Liverpool, Bristol and London (19). Before the decade of 1770s, the opposition against slave trade in Europe was minimal (because it was one of the most profitable institutions), in fact, communities as the Church, the Anglicans or the Quakers did not show straightforward resistance against it (Kelly 3). Nevertheless, all of a sudden Britain turned into the major leading cause that sought to abolish both slavery and slave trade (Temperley 10). The British abolitionist movement initially included two major influential aspects. On the one hand, philosophers and intellectuals began to show to the masses their opposition to the slave trade; and on the other hand, both Christian and Quaker communities, that is, religious communities publicly condemned slavery. All of them contributed to turn the notion of slavery into an institution characterized by immorality, inefficiency and cruelty (Marlene 33- 34). Besides, the spread of ideas appealing for freedom and natural rights also contributed to change the public opinion towards slavery (Temperley 10). In addition to it, one of the first events that anticipated and promoted the anti- slavery movement in Britain was the case of James Somerset, a black slave in England who was prevented by the Lord Chief Justice Mansfield in 1772 to be returned to Jamaica in order to be re-enslaved again. Somerset’s case was a historic moment for it recognized blacks not as slaves but rather as free human beings and showed that slavery in England lacked the law’s main support (Temperley 10).

Many activists considered that the first step in abolishing slavery was to outlaw the slave trade. They believed that by abolishing the slave trade, slavery would gradually come to an end as well (Kelly 5).

The first official organisation against slave trade, that is to say, the Society for the Abolition of the Slave trade (1787-1807), or also called The London Committee was established in May 1787 (Marlene 38). This new Committee included highly influential members such as William Bierceforce, who was a major figure in the Parliament, Thomas

Clarkson, whose role was to draw new allies in support of the organization by touring towns and cities around the country, or the important Granville Sharp, who publicized the *Zong* massacre. In the year 1781, the *Zong*'s Captain ordered his crew to throw 132 slaves overboard, letting them die in the ocean with the aim to claim the insurance policy. This incident was quickly publicised throughout Britain and is one of the events that promoted the abolitionist sentiment (Marlene 37-38).

One of the most relevant strategies the members of the Society for the Abolition of Slave Trade appealed to was the mass petitioning. The first petition campaign took place in 1787-1786, gathering an impressive number of submissions. According to Howard Temperley, in Manchester eleven thousand men signed for the anti-slavery petition. Two thousand in Sheffield and one thousand eight hundred in York, amongst others (Temperley 11). In this regard, apart from the massive public Parliament petitions, abolitionists appealed to other techniques such as meetings, the distribution of newspapers, pamphlets or other means of propaganda as literature in order to draw more citizens to the cause (Marlene 40). Finally, the Parliament outlawed British Slave Trade in 1807.

After the end of slave trade, the aim of the activists was focused on abolishing slavery itself. From this moment onwards, the African Institution (1807- 1827) was established, thus substituting the Society for the Abolition of Slave Trade and turning into the most anti- slavery influential group. Apart from being focused on enforcing the law of 1807, this organization was aimed at encouraging and convincing other countries to end with the slave trade (Temperley 12).

Meanwhile in the colonies, West Indian planters refused to carry out the anti-slavery reform. Nonetheless, slaves continued rebelling against the system. Therefore, for instance, the slave Jack Gladston in Demerara, Guyana, reached to gather roughly 13.000 slaves against its white masters. This events and many other of the like are what motivated the creation of the Anti- Slavery Society or also called 'the Society for the Amelioration and Gradual Abolition of Slavery' (1823-1839). This new society sook to ameliorate and improve the different reforms and besides, it had the support of influential members as Clarkson, whose role was once again to gather support. However, several disagreements and problems started to arise within the proper members of the society, resulting into an incision, giving way to the organization called the Agency Committee (1837- 1834) which did not support a gradual emancipation but rather an immediate one (12).

As a consequence of that immediate slavery abolition petition, news revolts took place. For instance, one of the most important revolts is the one so-called 'the Baptist War'. Between 1831-2 in the British colony of Jamaica, around 60.000 of slaves rebelled against their white masters in pursuit of their freedom (Kelly 11). Finally, the Emancipation Act passed by Parliament in 1833, ordering that from 1 August 1834 onwards slavery was banned. Nevertheless, the price for freedom was not cheap. In this sense, the Agency Committee demanded a quantity of 20 £ million to be paid to the slave owners in compensation for their losses (Temperley 13). Furthermore, this law ending slavery required a gradual transition to complete freedom, being established what was called apprenticeship. This apprenticeship system forced slaves to work for their former owners in exchange for clothes and food but without being paid. The situation seemed not to improve and consequently, several abolitionist members began to show their non-conformity towards apprenticeship and led several campaigns that eventually ended with slavery (14).

Therefore, as a brief conclusion, the abolition of the slave trade and finally of slavery in Britain was a long process or movement that began in the decade of 1780s and lasted until 1838. Thanks to the abolitionist organizations and religious groups that encouraged different campaigns, parliamentary reforms, slave resistance, and thanks to the rather massive participation of common people in the cause, slavery was eventually overthrown in Britain and in its colonies.

The literary production of the period was not oblivious to this antislavery movement. On the contrary, a good number of literary works reflected anti-slavery positions. In the following part, I will provide an overview of those romantic authors who reflected the wrongs of slavery and showed anti-slavery positions in their works.

4. SLAVERY AND ROMANTIC WRITING

The abolitionist movement in Britain, and more precisely the Society for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave trade –created in 1787- drew the attention of and encouraged many romantic writers from diverse social ranks to write against the slave trade and slavery. Besides, slavery romantic writing fostered a close relationship between writer and reader. On this matter, literary historians, such as Jon. P. Klancker, argue that during the Romantic Period ‘perhaps for the last time, it was still possible to conceive the writer’s relation to an audience in terms of... personal exchange of ‘power’ between writer and reader’. In fact, the relationship between the writers and the audience in the period became much closer than ever (Lee 26). Many of them believed that they had the duty to change the world through literature.

Many literary works –essays, testimonial works, novels or plays- were written in protest against slavery. However, it was the poetical language, the literary form which ‘dramatized the atrocity of slave- holding in manner that more realistic accounts could not’ (Swaminathan 102). One of the earliest influential poems that contributed to the anti-slavery sentiment in England is that of Thomas Day’s *The Dying Negro* (1733). The lyric, supposedly based on real facts, tells the story of a Negro slave who wished to commit wedlock with a white woman; nevertheless, before the ceremony the protagonist is unfortunately enslaved again and decides to commit suicide by shooting himself rather than submitting his life to the slaveholder. Slave traders and slave owners are portrayed as heartless, merciless whereas the enslaved main character is depicted as a passive figure that does not seek rebellion against his white master but rather chooses death over violence. The anti-slavery works by the activists Hannah More and Anna Yearsley usually deal with domestic issues such as the impossibility of creating solid African relationships or the difficulties of establishing a decent domestic space (Richardson 461). More’s *The Sorrows of Yamba*; or *The Negro Woman’s Lamentation* (1802) presents, as *The Dying Negro*, the fact of committing suicide rather than submitting to the horrors of slavery (Lee 30). In the same way, Helen Maria Williams’s *A Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulating the Slave Trade* (1788) presents the harsh and desperate situation of an African mother who decides to murder her child before he is enslaved (Swaminathan 108). John Newton also recounts in *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade* (1788) some

of the horrors of the Middle Passage¹ and presents the African woman as victim of the slave system. Newton's work denounces and describes African women's abuses and mistreatments at the hands of the white crew: 'When the Women and Girls are taken on board a ship, naked, trembling, terrified,... they are often exposed to the wanton rudeness of white Savages' (146).

Another important author who actively partook in the abolitionist campaign was William Cowper. In *The Task*, a poem published in 1785, Cowper condemned the practice of slave trade ('Slaves cannot breathe in England') and defended firmly the necessity of establishing the principle of freedom in the British colonies: We have no slaves at home – why then abroad? Also, *The Negro's Complaint* (1788) and *Sweet Meat has Sour Sauce, Or the Slave Trader in Dumps* (1788) were written by Cowper in support of the anti-slavery movement (Richardson 461).

During the abolitionist campaign in Britain, the widespread anti-slavery literature, the distribution of pamphlets, the creation of an emblem condemning slavery, or Thomas Clarkson's efforts on collecting slave-trade witnesses are some of the many noteworthy aspects. In that respect, many slaves in England that had experienced first-hand the process of slave trade decided to take part in the abolitionist campaign with the objective of demonstrating the importance of testimonials, in addition to questioning the notion of Africans as inferior, untutored, savage human beings. Along these lines, the most notable examples include Ottobah Cugano and his work *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of Human Species* (1787) in which is told his childhood and enslavement, or Olaudah Equiano and his autobiography *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789), which contributed to the emergence of a new literary genre, the slave narratives (462-463).

At the end of the decade of 1780s, abolitionists were close to obtain finally a victory in the parliament and thus a law banning the slave trade; nonetheless, all hope was lost when a new political instability and anxiety emerged from the French Revolution. Hence, Britain did not outlaw officially slave trade until 1807. This new context of anger, indignation and disillusionment inspired numerous writers. Thus for instance, Anna

¹ According to Toyin Falola and Amanda Warnock, Middle Passage refers to the journey "undertaken by slaves, captains and crews, that brought slaves from the coast of Africa to the Americas (Toyin and Warnock xv).

Barbauld wrote in an *Epistle* to William Willberforce Esq., *On the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade* (1792): 'Still Afric bleed; / Unchecked, the human traffic still proceeds'. In this epistle, Barbauld presents the British abuse and cruelty in the West Indies as well as condemning the destruction of the British Empire: 'By foreign wealth are British morals changed / And Afric's sons, and India's smile avenged' (463).

The outpouring anti-slavery literature also continued by the hand of William Blake, who wrote *The Little Black Boy*, included in *Songs of Innocence* (1789). The poem seems to challenge the traditional association of black skin with inferiority and savagery by presenting a black mother as an adviser guide and teacher: 'My mother taught me underneath a tree' (462). Thomas Chatterton in *African Eclogues* (1770) also subverts the notion of blackness by linking it with nobility and beauty (462). Thomas Campbell in spite of depicting in *The Pleasure of Hope* (1799) the African figure as an 'artless savage' and motivate the enhancement of some African cultures, it harshly criticises slavery. Samuel Taylor Coleridge also partook effervescently in the abolitionist movement. He gave a lecture in Bristol- city where was located one of the most important slave ports at the moment- in which he appealed for equality between Africans and Europeans in terms of intellectual ability, as well as defending the African culture and denouncing the horrors and brutality of both the slave trade and slavery (Islam 21). Furthermore, Coleridge's *The Ancyent Mariner* (1798) is closely linked with Robert Southey's *The Sailor who served in the Slave Trade* since both of them deal with mariner's tales and the sense of guilt and anxiety in relation to the slave trade practice (25).

After passing the Abolition law in the year 1807, numerous romantic writers continued publishing works with the intention to eventually abolish the slavery. Thus for example, Wilberforce explains in his *Letter in the Abolition of the Slave Trade* the reasons why he had strived so much in the abolitionist campaign. Besides, Clarkson published *History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament* in which is recollected the efforts of the Abolitionists throughout twenty years (Richardson 462).

Nonetheless, after the year 1809 anti-slavery literature started to decrease. Probably, the main reason was that after so many years of this type of poetry, which showed the deepest and real horrors of the slavery, led to the public to some boredom in that regard. Thus, for example, authors like Byron, Shelley, Keats or Felicia Hermans rejected colonial slavery though neither of them published any poem expressing explicitly

and directly their opposition. Finally, the parliament enacted the abolition of colonial slavery in the year 1833 (465).

Furthermore, many anti-slavery authors strived for drawing a large number of readerships, lower-class audience as well as high-class. In this regard, it was used strategies as the writing in 'popular idioms' or the 'adaptation of popular genres' in which is included 'the ballad and the vernacular tale'. Maria Edgeworth attempts with her work *The Grateful Negro* (1804) to appeal for new readers. The story contains a high-meaningful message: murders, rebellions and revolts are linked with African barbarism and change and harmony will be carried out by patronisers. The story also appeals to a gradually emancipation rather than to an immediate one. Harriet Martineau with *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-4) also attempted to gain new audiences by turning both social and political ideas into fiction. In *Demerara: A tale* (1832) refers to the slave revolt that took place in British Guiana in 1823 and defends that slavery is an inefficient system 'based on free wage labour' which should come to a sudden end (466).

On the other hand, in order to express their opposition to the slave trade, anti-slavery romantic writers modified their literary discourse. Thus, they developed different strategies to depict slavery and appeal the attention and sympathy of public. In order to do so, for instance, they modified the rhetoric of their language by using pejorative terms as 'slave holder' or 'slave trader' rather than 'planter' or 'merchant' or by referring to African people as 'father', 'son' or 'mother' so to give them humanity and thus, gain the audience's sympathy and sensibility (Swaminathan 95). Besides, they also pointed out the importance of the slave's liberty and how immoral and anti-Christian the commerce of slaves was. Moreover, in relation to the representation of the figure of the African slave, two common stereotypes or notions were developed. On the one hand, the depiction of the noble slaved who opposed against the white tyranny and, on the other hand, the 'poor creature who bowed down under the weight of enslavement' (105). Besides, some anti-slavery romantic writings attempted to manipulate or reverse the oppositions between white and black and 'Self and Other', or what Moira Ferguson calls 'Anglo-Africanist rhetoric':

An ideological system or discursive code in which white and black, English and African, civilized and savage, Christian and pagan, self and Other constitute the ruling polarities and define white English Christians as the norm against which the colonial 'Other' is measured and found lacking (Richardson 461).

Some romantic writers, therefore, strived for challenging the binary opposition of 'English and African', of good and evil and thus, the traditional association of blackness with savagery and inferiority and whiteness with superiority and dominance. Thus, for instance, as it has been already mentioned Blake's *The Little Black Boy* or Thomas Chatterton's *African Eclogues* use this Anglo- Africanist rhetoric.

Hence, anti-slavery writing contributed principally to publicize and denounce the real version of slavery and slave trade. In relation to the Romantic Movement in general, this kind of writing shows the writer's involvement in the political, social and cultural situation of the period. Romantic poets as Coleridge or Blake campaigned for the same reason and all of them wrote poems devoted to the anti-slavery opposition. The outpouring anti- slavery literature also continued by the hand of Robert Southey, who contributed actively in the Abolition movement publishing a series of ' Poems concerning the Slave Trade' (1794-1798), *To the Genius of Africa* (1797) and *The Sailor who had Served in the Slave Trade* (1798). The next section discusses briefly Southey's contribution to the romantic literary period and his relation with the anti-slavery movement.

5. THE YOUNG ROBERT SOUTHEY

Robert Southey (Bristol, 1744 - Keswick, 1843) was a prolific romantic writer known as one of the members of the 'Lake School'. He was a polemicist persona engaged with the political, social and literary situation of his period. From 1809 to 1930 he contributed to the *Tory Quarterly Review*, and in 1813 he was appointed as Poet Laureate (Pratt, *Robert Southey and the Context of English Romanticism* xvii-xviii). He also demonstrated a special interest in Portuguese and Spanish literature, becoming an honorary member of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language in 1814 as well as of the Spanish Academy of History in 1815 (Flores and González 2-3).

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Southey was one of the most important figures. As William Hazlitt notes in *The Spirit of Age* (1825) he was one of the best poets of his days, that is to say, he was better than his so much praised contemporaries Wordsworth, Coleridge or Byron (Hazlitt 181). Nevertheless, in spite of being such an important figure in the romantic period, his reputation or notoriety did not last very long. Southey was excluded from the romantic canon writers and became overshadowed by his contemporaries Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Keats, Byron and Shelley. After his death, his literary career stopped being printed and, as a consequence, there is hardly any modern editions gathering his literary career. As a matter of fact, there is only one edition which includes Southey's most experimental and controversial poems: *The Poetical Works, 1793-1810* (2014) (Pratt, *Robert Southey and the Context of English Romanticism* xviii- xix). This modern edition contains works as the oriental romances *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), the epics *Joan of Arc* (1796) and *Madoc* (1805), in addition to shorter poems. Southey indeed was relegated to the shadows of the romantic literature, however, in the recent years there have been an increasing interest Southey and his influence on the romantic period (xix-xx). For instance, Pickering and Chatto is the first critical editions of Southey's works. Lynda Pratt, Tim Fulford or Daniel Sanjiv Roberts are some of the scholars restoring Southey's place in the romantic writing canon. In addition, his private letters are being published on-line (Flores and González 2).

Southey was a major figure but difficult to categorise. He was such a prolific writer that dared to write a wide range of genres from poems, plays and essays to reviews, travel books and biographies. Therefore, it is difficult to label him simply as a poet, reviewer or essayist. In fact, he himself objected to being classified as a 'Lake Poet' and

even as a writer (xxi). As Hazlitt writes: 'He is not shaped on any model [...] he is wild, irregular, singular, extreme' (Hazlitt 175).

The Poet Laureate's early writing career was, however, characterized by a strong radicalism and fervour towards the French Revolution (Raimond 182). As was pointed out in the first section of this dissertation, Southey praised the liberal movement: 'Old things seemed passing away, and nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race' (Duff 25). In his years of radicalism, he was reluctant to the Church and, as a romantic figure, began to praise nature: 'To me, he said, every blade of grass and every atom of matter is worth all the Fathers' (Raimond 184). Besides, inspired by William Godwin's *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793), which criticises the upper classes of society, Southey realized that his duty was to write against the oppression, the dominants (185). His most revolutionary and radical works include *Walt Tyler* (1794), a powerful, fervent poem not only appealing to the words of the French Revolution- 'liberty, equality and fraternity'- but also attacking the members of the Church and the crown; *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794) which also champions the liberal French movement or *Joan of Arc* (1796), a long epic poem aimed to denounce social oppression as well as portraying the ideal of freedom (189-192).

Southey's early revolutionary literary writings are also remarkable for the publication of *Poems* (1797), a collection of shorter poems dealing with 'ballads, sonnets, 'Botany Bay Eclogues' or works on the slave trade' (Pratt, *Robert Southey and the Context of English Romanticism* xxv). Southey's radicalism and engagement with the political, social and cultural situation of the romantic period led him to take part in the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade. Apart from publishing a series of sonnets attacking the slave trade system, he collaborated in Coleridge's *Lecture on the Slave Trade* (1795), which denounced the horrors and brutality of the slave trade and appealed for equality and humanitarianism (Bolton 30). Besides, Southey refrained from buying one of the typical products coming from the plantation colonies as sugar, and besides urged his acquaintances to do the same (Haller 214). In a letter to Jon May, Southey expresses his complain towards the situation:

The Slave Trade has much disheartened me. that this Traffic is supported by the consumption of sugar is demonstrable — I have demonstrated it to above fifty persons with temporary success — & not three of those persons have persevered in rejecting it. this is perfectly astonishing to me — &

what can be expected from those who will <not> remedy so horrible an iniquity by so easy an exertion! (*CLRS* I 228)

Southey strongly believed in the individual and its actions as a means to changing society. Therefore, he considered that not only parliamentary support was needed to abolish the slave trade but also individual efforts (Bolton 30).

In this chapter, it has been explained Southey's early contribution to the literary romantic period and his engagement with the cultural, social and political situation, as that of the abolition of the slave trade. The chapter that follows moves on to discuss his poems aimed to abolish the slave trade as well as his anti-slavery position.

6. ROBERT SOUTHEY AND ANTI-SLAVERY ROMANTIC DISCOURSE

The purpose of this chapter is to explore Robert Southey's abolitionist discourse. For this purpose, I will analyse a series of six sonnets entitled 'Poems on the Slave Trade' and the poem "To the Genius of Africa", all of them included in his collection *Poems*, published in 1797. Finally, I will analyse "The Sailor who had Served in the Slave Trade", published a year later, in 1798.

Lynda Pratt notes in *Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793-1810* Vol 5 (2004) that 'between 1795 and 1799 [Southey] published three new volumes of original poems: the co-authored *Poems* (1795) and *Poems* (1797)'. These volumes are characterized by the usage of multiple genres, subjects and metres, showing his ability to parody or to protest against social injustices (Pratt, *Robert Southey: Poetical Works* xiii). Besides, thanks to the collection *Poems* (1797), Southey's notoriety and reputation was established. Due to its success, a second edition was released in the same year, but with a series of modifications. These include, for instance, the introduction of the preface to the 'Poems on the Slave Trade', which will be analysed later (xviii).

All these literary pieces – 'Poems on the Slave Trade', "To the Genius of Africa" and "The Sailor who had Served in the Slave Trade"- were composed and published in the years 1797-1798. At that moment, England was one of the leading nations as regards the practice of the slave trade but simultaneously the abolitionist campaign was in full fervour. The mission of Southey as a romantic writer concerned with the political situation of Britain was to denounce the horrors of slavery as well as drawing the attention of the audience, and therefore, gather more forces for the abolitionist fight.

4.1. 'POEMS ON THE SLAVE TRADE'

'Poems on the Slave Trade' is a sonnet sequence that reflects the different stages of slave-trade –from capture and journey to death- and includes the poem "To the Genius of Africa", which was first published as part of this collection. Hence, 'Poems on the Slave Trade' begins with a preface, in which Southey expresses his position towards slave trade, followed by six sonnets and closes with the poem "To the Genius of Africa".

The preface of this collection, as pointed out before, was not published in the first version of *Poems* (1797) but in the second edition. In the preface, Southey overtly describes his position and the goal of writing these poems. It opens with the following

quote: I am Innocent of this Blood, SEE YE TO IT! ². This quote is not original from Southey's own hand, but it rather belongs to a biblical verse, exactly to Matthew 27:28. It refers to Pontius Pilate and his decision to condemn Jesus in spite of finding him innocent. Pilate, seeing that he could not prevent Christ's execution that was much acclaimed by the masses, decided to wash his hands. The quote makes reference to those situations in which a person decides not to take part for fear of the consequences. The fact that Southey includes this quote at the outset of his preface is highly meaningful. Southey is not only condemning the slave trade system, but he also is declaring he does not support such practice and therefore he is not guilty of the slaves' bloodshed. He is in fact ironically using Pilate's sentence to criticise those English who had the chance to stand up against slave-trade but instead decided not to take action against it.

Later on, Southey advocates his position towards the end of the slave trade. He does not talk in abstract terms about slavery instead, he is close to the ground and discusses current political affairs. Thus, the preface makes reference to important political people such as William Wilberforce or Hector St. John. As pointed out in the section 'abolitionist movement in Britain', Wilberforce was a major figure in the Parliament and member of the first official organization against slave trade, that is, the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. He in fact led the anti-slavery movement and though his attempt to abolish slave trade in 1791 was defeated, Wilberforce and his abolitionist counterparts ended it in 1807 (Richardson 463). However, Southey criticises that the slave trade will not come to an end thanks to Parliamentary efforts, but rather: 'By the introduction of East- Indian or Maple Sugar, or by the just and general rebellion of the Negroes: by the vindictive justice of the Africans, or by the civilized Christians finding it in their interest to be humane' (49). Nevertheless, in the poems there are barely any references to the introduction of East- Indian or Maple Sugar. He instead emphasises the call to slave rebellion, being this method the more radical and revolutionary. In addition, there is reference to Hector St. John, who witnessed first-hand and afterwards denounced the horrors of the slave system publishing *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). 'The punishment sometimes inflicted upon a Negro for murder', as that Herctor St. John describes in his work, is also exposed in the last sonnet of the sequence.

² From now on I will be quoting from the following edition: Southey, Robert: *Poetical Works 1793 1810*, volume 5. *Selected Shorter Poems c. 1793-1810*. ed. Lynda Pratt, London and New York: Routledge, 2004. This one is: (49)

6.1.1 SONNET I ('Hold your mad hands! For ever on the plain')

The first sonnet of the collection focuses on the first stage of slave commerce, that is to say, the capture of black people in their homeland: 'Hold your mad hands! For ever on the plain!' (50, 1). The speaker puts an emphasis on this expression by repeating it in line five. The poem is set next to the Niger River, described as: 'Niger's tainted flood' (50, 3). The speaker is employing a powerful image to portray the impact of the slave trade system in the shores of Africa. Elements as natural and pure as the Niger River end up being corrupted and contaminated by the slave trade and therefore by innocent Africans' bloodshed.

Taking into consideration that Britain in the decade of 1790s was one of the leading nations trading in the Middle passage, the sonnet apart from underlying the importance of the slave commerce in Britain also condemns it: 'cold hearted Commerce there/ Breathes his gold-gender'd pestilence afar' (50, 12-13). The target of the sonnet are, as the last quote points out, slave trade system and slave traders. The slave trade system is described employing several euphemisms: 'banquet slain' (50, 4), 'arm of Slaughter' (50, 6), 'feast of gore' (50, 7) or 'pale fiend' (50, 12). The slave trade is therefore presented from the very beginning in terms of savagery, murder, slaughter and blood. Slave traders are described as well in pejorative terms: 'gorged vulture clog' (50, 2), 'ravenous shark' (50, 4). They are presented as greedy, selfish, and insatiable of gold. As Southey discusses in the preface, the English are immersed on 'exiting wars upon the Slave Coast that they may purchase prisoners' (49). In this sonnet, there is reference to those wars, addressed as 'kindred Daemon War' (50, 14). English slave traders are associated with Demons, thus being immoral, impious wicked and greedy. Besides, it is criticised that slave traders have only financial and monetary interest: 'gold-gender'd pestilence afar' (50, 13). They are immersed in a sort of war with the goal of capturing the highest number of Africans irrespective of their lives as human beings.

6.1.2 SONNET II ('Why dost thou beat thy breast and rend thine hair')

This sonnet represents the second stage in slave-trade, taking black people on the boat and starting the journey. The focus is mainly on the wife or lover who remains in the shore seeing the boat going away.

Compared to the previous poem, the perspective changes. Instead of addressing to those who commerce with slaves, it is focused on slave's suffering. The speaker wonders why Africans accept to live under enslavement: 'Why dost thou beat thy breast and rend thine hair' (50, 1). Later on the writer expresses his desperation and anxiety towards the situation, exclaiming that there is no mercy, no hope and no humanity in the human being. The narrator does not only say that there is not mercy in the slave traders, but in all the human-kind, thus including the readers: 'There is no mercy found in human kind' (51, 10).

This sonnet not only refers to the suffering of slaves endured during the boat trip, but also to the suffering of a black person who sees the boat where the lover or husband is being taken as a slave to another place. As a matter of fact, a black woman cries as the boat leaves and disappears in the distance: 'as the white sail dim lessens from thy view?' (51, 8). The last four lines are addressed to a black woman which is referred as a 'Widow' (51, 11). As pointed out in the section "Slavery and Romantic Writings", some anti-slavery writings usually emphasize the domestic space. Thus, writers attempt to depict humanity on slaves through domestic images underlying their family ties or the difficulties of establishing a decent domestic space under the slave trade system. In this sonnet it is depicted the impossibility of establishing a solid African family relationship. The fact that the woman is a widow implies that she will never see her husband again. Using this term, the speaker is aimed to produce empathy on the reader in addition to giving that humanity and equality with white people. As white people suffer for the loss or the forced separation of a husband, lover or relative, so do black people.

On the other hand, nature plays an important role in the poem. The breeze is presented at the outset as gentle and calmed but, in the last three lines, it dramatically changes. As the humankind is hopelessness and there is no solution nor possibility of changing the situation, the speaker calls 'the God of Justice' (51, 12) to arise a torment and free the black man from slavery:

But may the God of Justice bid the wind
Whelm that curst bark beneath the mountain wave,
And bless with Liberty and Death the Slave! (51, 12-14).

6.1.3 SONNET III ('Oh he is worn with toil! The big drops run')

In this sonnet, it is presented the picture of slaves working on the journey as well as all the punishment they undergo. It begins exposing directly the slaves' fatigue and exhaustion because of the harsh working conditions: 'Oh he is worn with toil! the big drops run / Down his dark cheek' (51, 1-2). The representation of the slaves clearly contrasts with the white masters' who take advantage of the slaves' suffering and pain. Furthermore, nature is presented as an ally of the enslaved system. By presenting the sun as 'Pityless as Proud Prosperity' (51, 5), the natural environment seems indeed to be corrupted and influenced by the horrors of slavery. Thus, it is not only the masters who abuse the slaves but, somehow, nature takes control of them and weakens them.

Unlike the other poems who are narrated by a third person speaker, this poem includes, for the first and last time, a first person narrator. Thus, the speaker's own emotions towards the situation are depicted, being implicit Southey's point of view towards slavery, which is characterized by indignation and pity. 'I than thee Gracious God! / That I do feel upon my cheek the glow Of Indignation' (52, 11-13). Furthermore, in this sense, the speaker addresses directly the reader, thus attempting to involve him in the situation: 'Oh ye who at your ease/ Sip the Blood –sweeten'd beverage!' (51, 9-10). Hence, apart from making the audience witnesses of the dreadful slavery events, the author is also accusing them of contributing on the slave trade.

Moreover, there is a clear juxtaposition between the skin colour of the slave and the white master. The slave is presented as a 'sable brother' (52, 14) whereas the European is described as a 'pale tyrant' (51, 3). Nevertheless, by using the term 'brother' to refer to the slave, the poet is able to portray him with dignity and humanity. The fact that the slave is a 'sable brother' (52, 14) is meant to demolish or destroy the barrier of the white reader and the slave as well as appealing for sympathy and equality. Besides, by this contrast of skin colour, Southey is using the device of Anglo – Africanist rhetoric, explained in the chapter "Slavery and Romantic Writing". The binary oppositions between white and black are manipulated. Thus, the writer is eliding the traditional association of black skin with evilness, darkness. On the contrary, the white slave traders are referred as 'inhuman trader' (51,8). They are described in a pejorative way, being associated with cruelty, meanness and brutality. Hence, the savage, the immoral, the other, is not the black slave but rather the white trader.

6.1.4 SONNET IV ('Tis Night, the mercenary tyrants sleep')

The beginning of the fourth sonnet may be interpreted as a direct denunciation against the judicial system in England. It basically states that both slavery and slave trade are institutions supported by the Law: 'Tis night; the mercenary tyrants sleep as undisturb'd as Justice!' (52, 1-2). Nevertheless, in the third line, the perspective changes and addresses the slave. The speaker addresses to portray the inner feelings and pain of the slave. Thus, the reader gets to know that, in the middle of the night, darkness and solitude, the slave whips and grieves. However during the working day, under the threatening power of the strap and therefore of the tyranny, the slave refuses to show his feelings: 'With dim grown eye, silent and woe-begone, / And weeps for him who will return no more' (52, 13-14). Even though slaves are silenced, dominated and trapped in a system which deprives them from their liberty and all their rights as humans, Southey is giving voice and, somehow, power to those voiceless, to those who are suffering but cannot stand up and complain.

In the last lines, the sorrowful grief of a black woman as a consequence of the forced separation is introduced again. Once again, by presenting the figure of a black woman, Southey gets to represent the issue of love. The 'Widow' (51, 11) in the second sonnet that sees the boat leave, now 'stands sad and gazes from her lowly door' (52, 12). The poem is in fact underlying the importance of black family ties. The fact that her husband will never come to her side again, makes her weep. That weep is not only aimed to portray Africans with humanity but also to evoke a sentiment of pity and sadness on the reader. Not only the black slave suffers under the boat journey and the slavery system but also those loved ones who remain in Africa. Nevertheless, even though the reader gets to know some of the feelings, thoughts or emotions of the black slave, in reality he lacks from psychological portrayal.

6.1.5. SONNET V ('Did then the bold Slave rear at las the Sword')

The beginning of this sonnet differentiates from the previous ones since it begins presenting the slave not as a passive figure that tolerates the load of work, tyranny and horrors, but rather as an active figure that decides to rebel against white masters and carries out his vengeance. In doing so, Southey employs a very vivid language: 'drench'd he Deep its thirsty blade / In the cold bosom od his tyrant lord' (53, 2-3). Moreover, the

sonnet not only incites to rebellion but also justifies it by wondering or asking: 'Who shall blame him?' (53, 4). Therefore, Southey does not only defend a violent rebellion that would result in the death of the white traders, but also holds that the insurrection is justifiable and necessary for the victory and liberation of the slaves. This sense of vengeance is already exposed in the preface of the collection. The preface indeed advocates that the end of the slave trade will come: 'By the introduction of East- Indian or Maple Sugar or by the just and general rebellion of the Negroes: by the vindictive justice of the Africans, or by the civilized Christians finding it in their interest to be humane: by the vindictive justice of Africans, or by the civilized Christians findings it in their interests to be humane' (49). The 'vindictive justice of Africans' is addressed in the following lines of the sonnet: 'he calls with fruitless breath,/ but sweetens with revenge, the draught of death' (53, 13-14).

Furthermore, the rebellion is leaded by the slave's own madness. The spectre of freedom, which stalks the slave and reminds the slave all he has lost because of slavery, brings about his madness. Hence, basic and natural need such as friendship, freedom or love are demolished by slavery: 'Of every past delight; his native grove/ Friendship's best joys, and Liberty and Love, / All lost for ever!' (53, 6- 7). In addition, the rhetorical device of personification is employed. Freedom appears as if it were a real spectre stalking the slave, thus the situation is even more emphasized: 'Freedom's pale spectre stalk'd, with a stern smile/ Pointing the wounds of slavery' (53, 10-11).

6.1.6 SONNET VI ('High in the air expos'd the slave is hung')

The last sonnet depicts the most unpleasant image of all the sequence. It begins describing the slave who rebelled and killed a white man in the previous sonnet being hung and eaten alive by birds: 'To all the birds of Heaven their living food!' (53, 2). Again, the poet employs a harsh, strong language that creates vivid images. Nevertheless, in spite the fact the slave is being devoured 'He groans not' (53, 3). In that sense, the anxious, rebelled slave presented in Sonnet V turns into a passive, obedient figure that still in his long and bitter death yields his will and life to slavery.

As in Sonnet III, the slave trade system is presented as such powerful force that is able to corrupt the natural environment by presenting the bird and 'the fierce Sun' (53, 3). Once again, the speaker shows his indignation towards the slave traders' unjustifiable right to snatching slaves' peace and liberty, he states: 'Murder is legalized' (54,12).

In the last two lines (54, 14-15), the speaker appeals for equality referring to the spiritual. In this part, the reader is able to know Southey's religious stance, which is Christianity. In fact, he claims that God's judgement will not make a difference between blackness and whiteness, that is to say, between Africans and English. If in the first sonnet English traders and common people are compared with Daemons, this poem goes further suggesting that in the end everybody will be judged by their own acts independently of their race, group or social position. Thus, it is shown that Southey and other abolitionists did not only care about the physical wellbeing but also about their souls: 'Before the Eternal 'thunder- tongued shall plead/ Against the deep damnation of your deed' (54, 13-14).

As Sonnet I begins addressing the target of the sequence, this last sonnet concludes as well addressing to the slave traders: 'O ye/ Who tore this Man from Peace and Liberty! (53, 6-7). Thus, from beginning to end it is clear who the targets of the sequence are.

Finally and foremost, it is remarkable mentioning that this collection of poems do not give voice to the enslaved figure but rather it is narrated from a third person. Moreover, the slave is not given identity at any moment. The fact that he remains unnamed during all sonnets may be interpreted that the slave stands for every slave. Thus, Southey does not focus his poem on just an individual enslaved experience but it renders the situation of the whole slave system.

6.2. "TO THE GENIUS OF AFRICA"

The poem is dated in Bristol in 1795 and originally included in the 'Poems on the Slave Trade' in the collection *Poems* (1797). The poem is related with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lecture on the Slave Trade* (1795). Pratt notes a close connection with *Lecture on The Slave Trade*: "The lost original MS of the lecture was identified by E.H. Coleridge as being 'partly in the handwriting of S.T.C & partly in that of R.S'" (Pratt, *Poetical Works* 54).

The first stanza presents some sort of superior, divine figure in bond and harmony with the African Nature: 'O Thou who from the mountain's height' (54, 1). The stanza also includes outstanding natural African landscapes like the Nile and refers to the city Palmyra, located in Syria. The fact that Palmyra is associated with the term 'sepulchral plain'(54, 4) may be interpreted as a city linked with innocent deaths. Moreover, there is also a reference to the Arabic slave trade. By making reference to other region where

slave trade takes places, Southey is not only denouncing British slavery but he rather condemns the whole slavery system.

In the second stanza, the speaker urges the divinity now called 'Genius' (54, 10) to hear the laments of its people, of its African nation: 'Hear genius hear thy children's cry' (54, 10). The stanza also makes reference to the 'midnight songs' (54, 15) in Gambia.

These two first stanzas are aimed to set the mood of the poem. They are an introduction to the divinity 'Genius' and the situation. Nevertheless, in the third stanza, the situation, language and intonation change. Once the Genius is aware of the situation, the speaker urges him to take action: 'Genius avenge thy children's wrong!' (55, 20). In addition, exclamation are employed as a device to call the attention of the audience and produce an effect of gravity as well as intensity of the situation. For instance, it is striking the phrase 'the Daemon COMMERCE' (55, 21). As it appears in capital letters it underlines the connection between both terms. It definitely calls the attention of the reader which rapidly gets the pejorative representation of the practice of the slave trade. The description of slave trade as 'Daemon COMMERCE', also mentioned on 'Sonnets on the Slave Trade', is aimed underline the sinfulness and immorality of slave traders. Soon after, Southey implies that the practice of the slave trade brings about death, blood and horror to the Africans:

Pours all the horrors of his train,
And hark! Where from the field of gore
Howls the hyena o' ver the slain!
LO! Where the flaming village fires the skies! (55, 22-25).

The last line of this third stanza introduces the call to rebellion and vengeance: 'Avenging Power awake- arise!' (55, 26). This line will be repeated at the end of the next two following stanzas. This call to rebellion is related as well with the 'vindictive justice of Africans' (49) in the preface and the sonnet sequence.

Four stanza evokes a familiar image. It introduces the figure of an African mother taking care of her sick baby. If in 'Sonnets on the Slave Trade' the Niger River was contaminated by the horrors of slavery and slave trade, in this stanza, the air is 'hot infectious' (55, 29). Natural elements, which are supposed to be pure, clean and bring life are corrupted by the presence of the slave trade. By presenting this maternal relationship the speaker is able to reinforce the situation, giving more tragedy and affliction. The stanza becomes violent, as it says: 'Christian fear / The drooping infant from her breast!' (55, 31-32). It is important to mention that the speaker refers to the slave traders in

religious terms. The fact that a Christian snatches a poor, defenceless African woman from her baby it is a harsh, powerful image that emphasizes the English's immorality and cruelty.

Fifth stanza, which is the harshest of the poem, is much more rhythmical by the repetition of words, creating a sense of urgency and anxiety. In fact, it presents the nature of crimes, tortures and death that slave trade entails:

By every groan of deep distress
By every curse of wretchedness,
By all the train of Crimes that flow
From the hopelessness of Woe' (55, 42-45).

The stanza clearly points to the guilty of African's wrongs, that is, Europeans. Besides, in the same way as third and four stanza, the speaker encourages effervescently the Africans to fight against their oppressors: 'By Afric's wrongs and Europe's guilt, / Awake! Arise! Avenge!' (55, 47-78).

In sixth stanza, once the Genius has heard all his children crying and has witnessed the exasperating situation, decides to arise and take revenge. The speaker describes 'avenging hurricanes' (56, 50) over 'their blood- fed plains' (56, 49) and 'storms with whirlwind roar / Dash their proud navies on the shore' (56, 51-52). The destruction and vengeance will be carried out by the superior powers of the Genius.

The last stanza of the poem begins by presenting Justice. It says that an 'Inhumane Power has snatch'd the sword!' (56, 59). The narrator, employing a metaphor, is implicitly saying that Justice, which is supposed to be characterized by respect, equality, liberty and honor among, is in fact corrupted and dominated by an Inhumane Power. The fact that the narrator employs broadly the term 'Inhuman Power' is aimed to address not only to the authorities but also to all those individuals who are witness of the slave trade and do not stand against it.

The last lines of the stanza is perhaps the most important of the whole poem since it foreshadows what will happen in the future:

' Justice shall yet unclothe her eyes,
Terrific yet in wrath arise,
And trample on the tyrant's breast,
And make Oppression groan oppress' (56, 63-66).

These last four lines summarize the intention of the poem. The speaker is foreshadowing a revolution, a rebellion. The oppressor is meant to be oppressed. The

rebellion announced in the preface, throughout the sonnet sequence and throughout this poem is overtly displayed in this quote. In addition, the speaker employs the rhetorical device of personification. Justice will awake, will get rid of that Inhuman Power and will eventually oppress and defeat the tyranny.

Regarding all mentioned so far, “To the Genius of Africa” is an anguish, overwhelming poem which includes religious, natural and cultural images and overtly describes Southey’s position towards the slave trade.

6.3 “THE SAILOR WHO HAD SERVED IN THE SLAVE TRADE”

“The Sailor who had Served in the Slave Trade” is perhaps the most well-known Southey’s poem in his anti-slavery discourse. Its publication in 1798 caused stir at the period. Different critics and writers defend that ‘The Sailor’ is a response to Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem ‘The Ancyent Mariner’ (1798), included in *Lyrical Ballads*. In fact, Southey wrote about Coleridge’s poem:

Many of the stanzas are laboriously beautiful, but in connection they are absurd or unintelligible... We do not sufficiently understand the story to analyse it. It is a Dutch attempt at German sublimity. Genius has here been employed in producing a poem of little merit (Bolton 45).

Thus, critics as Christopher Smith have interpreted Southey’s poem as a response to ‘The Ancyent Maryner’, arguing that ‘The Sailor’ is: ‘An intelligible, authentic story of social concern publicly told without embellishment, with the reinforcing statement that such tales need publicity’ (45). In any case, “The Sailor who Had Served in the Slave Trade” is a poem which was not only meant to contribute on the abolitionist movement but also, taking into consideration that it was one of Southey’s most significant contributions in the romantic poetry discourse, the poem was meant to be interpreted as a ‘didactic lesson in how such a poem should be written’ (45). ‘The Sailor’ is indeed an emotional and sentimental ballad devoted to the experience of a Christian sailor and his inner guilt originated from flogging an innocent black slave woman who refused to eat. The poem in general lines depicts the psychological problems the commerce of slaves may entail. Unlike the other poems analysed, the poem is not focused on the vision and experiences of the slaves themselves, but it rather portrays, from a third person narrator, the guilt of a common British sailor man.

In the preface, Southey announces that the story is based on factual events, so to give more authenticity and appealing. Besides, as his role as abolitionist, he defends that this type of stories must be publicized so that everybody knows about the slave trade practices:

In September 1798, a Dissenting Minister of Bristol, discovered a Sailor in the neighbourhood of that City, groaning and praying in a hovel. The circumstance that occasioned his agony of mind is detailed in the annexed Ballad, without the slightest addition or alteration. By presenting it as a Poem the story is made more public, and such stories ought to be made as public as possible (289).

From the very beginning of the poem, the poet creates an atmosphere of anguish and despair by presenting the sailor's suffering. Southey presents the sailor kneeled and praying to God as well as his mental state: "With many a bitter groan, / In such heat-anguish as could spring/ from deepest guilt alone" (289, 18-20). This sense of anxiety increases gradually as the poem itself develops. In fact, the sailor is so overwhelmed, guilty and responsible of what he has done, which is described as 'a wicked thing' (290, 25), that 'haunts [him] day and night' (290, 26). Then, it is revealed some of the horrors of the Middle Atlantic Passage. The protagonists begins a journey from Britain to the slave-coast where they take 'three hundred negroe slaves' (291, 63). During the journey, slaves refuse to eat. As a consequence, an enslaved woman is squared by the protagonist and the next day she dies because of it. This passage is the climax of the story, as it is depicted how the woman is tortured. It is at this point when the reader realizes what had been tormenting the sailor. Besides, this passage is the most violent of the whole poem not only by the fact that a slave is tortured but also because the slave is woman, which is usually considered a figure more vulnerable. Besides, Southey employ powerful and vivid imagery to describe the death of the woman: 'She twisted from the blows – her blood/ Her mangled flesh I see- (291, 81-82). Nevertheless, the sailor squared the women against his will: 'The Captain made me tie her up' (291, 73). In that sense, it is the captain who forces him to punish her. In the ship, sailors were forced to mistreat the slaves, if they refused they would be punished too: 'So therefore we were forced by threats / and blows to make them eat' (291, 68-69). Nevertheless, even though the sailor killed the woman unintentionally, he feels so guilty about it that asks for forgiveness. In this sense, the poem includes religious themes such as repentance, forgiveness or sin. In this sense, the sailor

entrusts to God and asks him to forgive his crimes. Besides, it is remarkable to note that the sailor establishes an association of the slave trade with sin, Hell and fire: 'And every place is Hell! (290, 42).

In addition, unlike the poems analysed previously, it is important to mention that the slaved woman has no voice in the poem. It is not expressed the slaves' feelings or thoughts, only her suffering: "She groan'd, she shriek'd (291, 78). This means that Southey wanted with this poem give voice and power to the sailor. The poem is indeed focused on the sailor, and thus the perspective of a person that traded and dealt with slavery but from above.

On the other hand, the tone, the rhythm and the rhyme as well as the title, are the main elements that contribute on giving the poem that sense of guilt and despair. The tone is aimed to cause the reader the same feelings as those of the sailor. Besides it is aimed to create awareness and concerns of the events taking place in the process of slave trading. Hence, Southey attempts to make the reader conscious about the atrocities of slavery and thus draw them in the participation for the abolition.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation, we have dealt with the main issues as regards social romanticism and its relation with Southey's Poems on The Slave Trade. The first section of this dissertation was aimed to give some insight into the defining features of romanticism. Thus, it has been explained that the Romantic period experienced an aesthetic revolution which was also fostered by the political and social unrest. In this age of revolution, the poet began to be considered a hero with the duty of changing the world. Therefore, the problem of slavery in Britain was one of the historical events that triggered the romantic imagination and romantic writers contributed on its abolition through their works.

In order to know the importance of the British abolitionist movement, it has been provided a brief review about the process performed to abolish the slave trade. The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade established in 1797 developed different strategies to end the slave trade. Thus, abolitionists appealed to mass parliamentary petitions, meetings, distribution of pamphlets or literature reflecting the wrongs of slavery. As a matter of fact, the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade drew the attention of and encouraged many romantic writers from diverse social ranks to write against slave trade and slavery. They strived for drawing a large number of readerships, from lower-class audience to high-class. In order to denounce the horrors of the slave trade, they modified their literary discourse and pointed out its immorality. Romantic poets as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Blake or Robert Southey devoted part of their literary production to the anti-slavery movement.

Robert Southey was one of the best poets of his days, however, his reputation and notoriety did not last very long. Recently, scholars are restoring Southey's place in the romantic writing canon. Southey's early career was characterized by a strong radicalism and revolution, believing that his duty was to write against the oppression and the tyranny. Thus, he published a series of sonnets attacking the slave trade system: 'Poems on the Slave Trade' (1797), "To the Genius of Africa" (1797) and "The Sailor who Had Served in the Slave Trade" (1798). All of them are aimed to publicize and denounced the horrors of slave-trade from different perspectives. Thus, for instance, in the preface of 'Sonnets on the Slave Trade' he overtly describes his position towards the slave trade. He suggests that it will not be abolished thanks to Parliamentary efforts but rather by an African rebellion, revolution and vengeance. As a matter of fact, this sentiment of revolution

prevails throughout the sonnet sequence and “To the Genius of Africa. As it has been analysed, the sonnet sequence reflects the different stages of slave-trade, from capture and journey to death. “To The Genius of Africa” encourages effervescently to fight against the oppressors, dominance and tyranny. Finally, “The Sailor who had Served in the Slave Trade” introduces the despair and anxiety of a English sailor resulting from the horrors of the slave trade.

I would like to conclude my dissertation advancing some possible future lines of research deriving from the present work. Above all, I would like to underscore the need of new reviews, editions and critics of Robert Southey and his contribution to the romantic period since he was one of the most important and influential poets. Also, it would be interesting to know in detail Southey’s collaboration on Coleridge’s *Lecture on The Slave Trade*. Finally, because of the close relationship between Southey and Coleridge, a critical comparison could be carried out about Southey’s “The Sailor who had Served in the Slave Trade” and Coleridge’s “The Ancyent Maryner”.

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